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AUTHOR Grotberg, Edith H.
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ABSTRACT

This study examined cultural/ethnic similarities and differences in ways to promote resilience in children identified in the International Resilience Research Project (IRRP), focusing on Sudan, Namibia, and Armenia. Child resilience was assessed through the child's responses to a hypothetical situation in which a child is teased and frightened by older students and then tells her mother she is ill and cannot attend school. Findings indicated that there were cultural similarities and differences in resilience promotion. Sudanese parents encouraged a sense of autonomy and confidence, Namibian parents expressed love but stressed the need to be responsible, and Armenian parents provided a loving trusting relationship, encouraged autonomy with support as needed, and showed empathy and built confidence. The relative absence of expressing love and empathy in Sudan when children had problems suggested a greater emotional detachment than in the other two countries. Parents and children from each site focused on communication skills and problem solving. Children in Sudan and Namibia solved their own problems by seeking help outside the family or solving the problem alone; in Armenia the interaction between parents and children continued over the course of resolving the problem. Parent actions preventing resilience were similar in each country and occurred in about 30 percent of the responses. The large percentage of children receiving little or no help or support suggests the extent of the need for the promotion of resilience in children. (Contains 11 references.) (Author)

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RESILIENCE AND CULTURE/ETHNICITY EXAMPLES FROM SUDAN, NAMIBIA, AND ARMENIA[1]

Edith H. Grotberg, Ph.D.

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The universality of resilience factors used in promoting resilience in children identified in the International Resilience Research Project (IRRP), highlights the common concerns of society for helping children address experiences of adversity. The analysis of data from 27 sites in 22 countries provided by more than 1200 families with children from infancy to age 12, highlighted this universality However, the research also identified some clear cultural/ethnic differences in ways to promote resilience in children, which achieved the same goal of successfully addressing experiences of adversity. Cultural and ethnic differences are difficult to identify, particularly from a psychological or developmental perspective. And resilience, as studied in the IRRP, involved both the psychological and the developmental perspectives. A brief look at some literature provides some clarification of the current limits of knowledge of cultural/ethnic differences and similarities. Within these limits, however, the examination of three countries participating in the IRRP may be examined.

Differentiating culture/ethnic groups

The limits of identifying characteristics unique to cultural/ethnic groups are well described by J.S. Phinney (1996). In reviewing the literature, she indicates that much of the research is limited in definition, measurement and differentiation of group characteristics. The results are generalizations rather than specifics about whether a cultural/ethnic group stresses individualism more than collectivism; independence more than interdependence; separation more than family affiliation; acquisition for self more than generosity; self-fulfillment more than interpersonal harmony. And these are not categorical so much as dimensions along which individuals and groups vary and, indeed, change over time.

Not only are cultural/ethnic characteristics on a continuum, they are also variable as a result of changes in society and of various program interventions. Some examples are provided, including three studies from Sudan; the International Resilience Research Project (IRRP), which involved four countries of the Pacific Rim; and research in Singapore, and in Taiwan, also from the Rim.

Two of the three studies in Sudan were conducted at the Ahfad University for Women at Omdurman. The University incorporates into its mission and curriculum a goal of strengthening women in knowledge, skills, roles, identity and autonomy. The two studies involved the students at the University. One (Yiboe & Burchinal, 1985) examined the impact of education on women as it related to social change. Data from fourth year students indicted that about 71% of them

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had more schooling than their fathers and 97% exceeded that of their mothers. 86% of the students were single, indicating postponement of the highly valued early marriage. Also the 14% married students indicated departure from the traditionally domestic roles of married women. Another study (King, Cowan & Galejs, 1987) compared sex-role attitudes of first and fourth year students to determine changes as a result of the educational experience. Fourth year students had more non-traditional attitudes toward interpersonal relationships; i.e., more social interaction with others than family members and with male friends, and with more progressive attitudes toward social change, than did the first year students. Both first and fourth year students held non-traditional attitudes toward education, suggesting a selective factor in entering Ahfad and seeing education as critical for women, contrary to traditional values. However, when considering issues of domestic duties, and deference to the authority of a potential husband, the more traditional values dominated. The students were willing to postpone marriage in a non-traditional way but not the traditional marriage relationship. Social changes occurred in a non-linear way with variability in changing patterns more than predictable patterns.

The third study (Grotberg, Badri & King, 1987) in Sudan, focused on the effects of an early stimulation program on child rearing practices of mothers. The observed changes in the mothers' child rearing practices included: increased interactions with their children; displaying more interest in their children as well as more tolerance and patience; responding to children's curiosity and encouraging them to explore; and shifting from punishment to verbal rewards. The measured changes in the child's developmental level were significant. These changes suggested greater flexibility with cultural/ethnic groups than expected, especially when clear benefits to the children are perceived.

Another study (Cheong, 1996), occurred in Singapore, making comparisons with other neighboring cultural/ethnic groups. The intent was to identify changes in traditional values of harmony, group orientation, etc., to more western values of independence , competition, etc. The results seemed clear that independence and competition were emerging as values, especially in the economic area. The International Resilience Research Project, which gathered data from Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam and Thailand, found that in Taiwan and Japan, educational competition occurred as early as the preschool level, where tutors are often hired to prepare the young children for an educational advantage when they enter school and also while continuing school. Another study in Taiwan by Rosina Chia, et al., (1997) indicated that Chinese are competitive and aggressive with outside groups but not with inside groups, where vertical relationships demand obedience and dependence.

It seems that changes are made in cultural/ethnic values when there are sufficient incentives or acceptable areas for changes. Such changes add to the complexity, variability and flexibility that confound attempts to study cultural/ethnic values.

In Phinney's review of the literature, she addressed the nature of the relationship between culture/ethnicity and psychological outcomes, indicating it is unclear and, therefore, limited in explaining specific social, emotional, cognitive and mental health outcomes. These are, however, especially important to understanding the role of culture/ethnicity in the promotion of resilience in children. Two outcomes identified by Phinney and consistent with resilience are:

educational achievement and mental health.

The outcome of mental health is a major concern in studying resilience as it is critical to a child's feelings of confidence, hope, trust and love, and an ability to seek help and solve problems that are perceived as experiences of adversity. The outcome of educational achievement, however, is not necessarily directly related to resilience. A child may well experience educational achievement in school but is not able to face experiences of adversity, except in the educational setting; i.e., school work. A more appropriate word suggested is: Mastery. This concept is more universal and applies to mastery of skills, problem solving, communication, reaching out for help, etc., beyond the school setting. Further, the concept of mastery is consistent with child development, and with the changes over time requiring mastery of new skills and abilities not limited to school. Resilience also is promoted over time and the role of mastery in the promotion of resilience shifts and/or enlarges accordingly.

The promotion of resilience may well be perceived as occurring within a cultural/ethnic setting in which mental health and mastery outcomes are evident. The International Resilience Research Project falls into this setting and may be examined according to the psychological outcomes suggested by Phinney. These psychological outcomes, as applied to the IRRP, have been placed into a paradigm o three sources of resilience: I HAVE; I AM; I CAN (Grotberg, 1995). Thus, the cultural/ ethnic identity of a child reflects the supports, values, role models, and limits determined by a culture/ethnic group. In the resilience paradigm, these are under external supports, labeled I HAVE. The mental health of a child reflects the extent to which a culture fosters identity, self-esteem, empathy, autonomy, altruism, responsibility, hope. In the resilience paradigm, these are considered inner strengths, labeled I AM. The mastery the child acquires reflects the extent to which a culture encourages mastery of different skills, especially in communication, problem solving, and management of behavior. In the resilience paradigm, these are considered interpersonal and problem solving skills, labeled I CAN. Cultural/ethnic differences are expected to influence the ways resilience is promoted, especially in the number, combination and dynamics of resilience features used from each part of the paradigm, in addressing experiences of adversity.

Three sites from the IRRP were selected to examine cultural/ethnic similarities and differences in the promotion of resilience in children. The sites were metropolitan Khartoum, Sudan; Katatura, Namibia; and Yerevan, Armenia. Two methods were used to identify cultural/ethnic similarities and differences in the promotion of resilience in children. One was to examine child rearing practices. This method is consistent with the recognition that resilience is promoted over time and that cultural/ethnic aspects important to promoting resilience begin early and are stressed differentially over time. The second was to compare cultural/ethnic differences, using Phinney's focus on educational achievement (mastery) and mental health.

Studies in Sudan provided information on child rearing practices and the stability of such practices over time. The families participating in the IRRP in Namibia and in Armenia were described as traditional. Therefore, it seems appropriate to assume similar stability in child rearing practices in Namibia and in Armenia, as in Sudan. With that assumption, ways of promoting resilience in children as part of child rearing practices are compared, using the data

from the International Resilience Research Project. Parents of children ages 9-11 and children of those ages are used in the comparisons. Younger children do not have many skills in promoting their own resilience, relying primarily on adults.

Stability of child rearing practices

Metropolitan Khartoum, Sudan, is primarily an Arab speaking, Moslem area and continues to value a patriarchal social system. The child rearing practices described in the studies are assumed to reflect the culture/ethnicity of the area.

Two studies in Sudan, one in 1978 (Badri) and the other in 1987 (Grotberg and Badri) indicate that child rearing practices, measured by the same instruments, had not changed over an eight year period. They were consistent both in parental behaviors and in the effects of income level.

The consistent findings involving high- and low-income urban families from metropolitan Khartoum, and with children under the age of 6, were these:

Discipline of children: Both low and high income parents want children to obey immediately to a command, while high income parents praise their children who do a task immediately more frequently than low income parents. Both insist that children do what is requested, but many in both income groups forget to enforce the request. Low income fathers punish their children more frequently than high income fathers and use physical punishment - hitting, slapping - more than non-physical punishment - talking, withholding. High income fathers punish less and use non-physical punishment more. High income mothers punish more by hitting with their hand while low income mothers punish more with an instrument, like a stick. Both high and low income mothers occasionally discuss with the child what he/she did wrong, but physical punishment is more frequent. However, both high and low income parents have a special reward for a child when he/she behaves well.

Acceptance of child: Both low and high income parents provide the attention children desire, but low income parents accept a child following them around more than high income parents. This is particularly true for girls in low income families. On the other had, high income parents answer the many questions of their children more than low income parents. Parents of neither income level were willing to ignore a child's outbursts of anger against adults.

Interaction with child: Mothers and fathers of both income groups interact with their children through play and doing some activities together, but high income families take their children to the library or a museum or a trip more frequently than low income families. The differences are highly significant. Further, high income parents answer questions children ask more frequently than do low income parents, as was stated above.

Expectations for child: Both high and low income parents want university education for their boys and girls and want high status positions for them in the future. However, more high income parents are providing a preschool education program for their children.

Some common themes, difficult to measure, but observed in child rearing practices in Sudanese families, regardless of income level, are these:

a. A great deal of displayed affection for young children;
b. Emphasis on the socialization of children;
c. Reliance on emotional support for children from extended family members;
d. Preference for quiet, obedient children;
e . Impatience with active, curious, inquisitive children;
f. Turning children over to extended family members for care or rearing.

Resilience in urban Sudanese children 9 to 11 years of age

When the data from the IRRP for the 9 to 11 year old Sudanese children was examined in terms of what behaviors were promoting resilience in children and what behaviors were preventing the development of resilience, patterns of child rearing practices seem to play a role. Responses by both parents and children in Sudan to the following constructed Situation provided information to determine the promotion or prevention of resilience in the child, and the role of child rearing practices as shaped by culture/ethnicity.

7.

Situation

Nine year old Rita walks to school every day and passes a place where a group of older children stands around. When she passes them they call to her, make fun of her and sometimes push her. She has become so frightened she refuses to go to school any more and tells her mother she is sick. Her mother knows she is healthy.

The most frequently used parents' responses to this which promote resilience in the child include:

a. helping the girl resolve the problem (problem solving I CAN)
b. encouraging the girl to resolve the problem herself (autonomous I AM)
c. being a role model in how to resolve the problem (role model I HAVE)

The most frequently used parents' responses that prevent the development of resilience in the child include:

a. forcing the truth
b. punishing the girl for lying
c. leaving her alone to solve her own problem
d. expecting the girl to hate school, not attend school, or become ill
e. displaying little emotion of caring or empathy to the girl

The most frequently used children's responses to this which promote resilience include:

a. asking a parent or teacher to help (trusting relationship I HAVE)
b. ignoring the kids or making friends with them (autonomy I AM)

c. solving the problem alone or with a friend (problem solving with help I CAN)

The most frequently used children's responses that prevent the development of resilience include:

a. being punished or scolded for lying
b. not expecting any help from parents
c. do nothing
d. will not be required to attend school
e. will wander the streets instead of going to school
f. will feel sad, angry and afraid

The distancing of parents from children that was observed in the earlier child rearing practices seemed to persist. Parents often do not wish to be bothered with their children's concerns and react to problems by discipline, indifference or expectations that children should solve the problem themselves. The children who demonstrated resilience are seen to rely on themselves or their friends to a greater extent than on adults. When they do not demonstrate resilience, they seem to withdraw with feelings of anger, sadness and fear. They also expect punishment and no help from parents.

Assuming similar consistency over time in the more traditional child rearing practices in Katatura, Namibia, and Yerevan, Armenia, IRRP data from those sites are compared and contrasted with data from Sudan. It is suggested that these reflect cultural/ethnic differences in child rearing practices that impact on resilience in children 9 - 11.

Katatura, Namibia

Namibia, a former part of South Africa, is sparsely populated and its people experience a good deal of poverty. Katatura was a former Homestead for Blacks and, while it is now nominally interracial, the population is almost entirely Black. Great love is expressed to children by family, but also harsh punishments results from unacceptable behavior.

The most frequently used parents' responses to the same Situation which promote resilience in the child include:

a. calming the girl (sense of being lovable I AM)
b. urging talking about what is going on (communication I CAN)
c. showing empathy (empathy I AM)
d. expressing love (trusting, loving relationship I HAVE)
e. pointing out that school attendance is her responsibility (locus of control I AM)
f. helping her to solve the problem (seeking help in problem solving I CAN)

The most frequently used parents' responses that prevent the development of resilience in the child include:

a. hitting the girl for lying

b. forcing the truth
c. feeling sad and afraid for the girl, but not helping
d. feeling angry but doing nothing
e. forcing the girl to go to school

The most frequently used children's responses that promote resilience include:

a. telling the truth even while feeling guilty for lying (morality and responsibility I AM)
b. resolving the problem with the help of her parent (trusting relationship I HAVE; and problem solving I CAN)

The most frequently used children's responses that prevent resilience include:

a. being beaten for lying
b. fearing she will not have friends if her mother appears
c. being shouted at
d. fearing the problem will continue

Yerevan, Armenia

The families in Yerevan, Armenia, speak Armenian, and maintained their traditional family system even while under control of the USSR. Frequently, the mother or grandmother is the dominant person in rearing children, but the father has a strong role in family matters and is highly respected by the children. The boys engage in a good deal of fighting among themselves. However, there is evidence from both boys and girls that they have an effective working relationship with parents in the process of facing experiences of adversity.

The most frequently used parents' responses to the same Situation which promote resilience in the child include:

a. talks to mother and shares feelings of fear (communication I CAN; trusting relationship I HAVE)
b. mother helps girl solve problem with help (problem solve; seek help I CAN)
c. shows child how to deal with situation (role model I HAVE)
d. helps the child feel safe (trusting, caring relationship I HAVE)
e. encourages child to gradually solve the problem herself, but with support (encouraging autonomy I HAVE)
f. mother feels the child's pain (empathy I AM)
g. calms child and assures her that everything will be all right (hope and faith I AM)
h. showing the girl how much she is loved (being lovable I AM)

The most frequently used parents' responses that prevent resilience include:

a. mother forces attendance
b. girl continues to feel fearful

c. parent does nothing but feels she should intercede
d. thinks girl believes she is bad, but does nothing to help
e. girl would learn her lesson and tell the truth after this

The most frequenly used children's responses that promote resilience include:

a. mother and girl discuss the problem together and agree on a strategy (communication and problem solving I CAN)
b. girl feels confident; loved and respected by her mother (hope and faith; being lovable; self-esteem I AM)
c. girl trusts her mother to help her and to urge her to participate in solving the problem (trusting relationship; encouraging autonomy I HAVE)
d. when parent is not helpful, girl solves problem with her friends (seeks help; communicates; problem solves (I CAN)

The most frequently used children's responses that prevent resilience include:

a. parent tells girl she is not telling the truth and ends the discussion
b. child feels afraid and needs to confess, but there is no reconciliation
c. the problem is not resolved
d. the girl is scolded and spanked
e. the girl continues going to school and continues to feel afraid
f. the girl feels helpless, with no supports

Cultural and ethnic differences and similarities

Here are the major responses from the three sites that concern the mental health and mastery aspects of resilience. Also included is an identification of what prevents the promotion of resilience. This is followed by comparing the responses to identified and assumed child rearing practices reflecting cultural/ethnic similarities and differences.

Most Frequently Used Responses
in the Promotion and Non-promotion of Resilience

	Sudan	Namibia	Armenia
Mental Health:	autonomy; confidence	empathy; expressions of love feeling lovable	empathy; expressions of love; self-esteem; feeling lovable; confidence
Mastery:	role models; communication; problem solving; seek friends	communication; problem solving	sharing feelings; share process of problem solving; seek friends

Prevents promotion of resilience	indifference; punishment for lying; withdrawal and illness; wandering streets; sad, angry, afraid	parents concerned about own feelings; punishment; forced attendance; no resolution; will lose friends	forced attendance; no resolution; sees self as bad; must tell truth; punishment; fearful; helpless

Comparisons

A comparison of the responses from the three sites that promote resilience suggest that in terms of mental health, Sudanese encourage a sense of autonomy and confidence. In Namibia, the parents express a good deal of love, make the child feel lovable but stress the need to be responsible. And in Armenia, parents provide a loving, trusting relationship, encourage autonomy but with continued support as needed, show empathy and build confidence. The children at each site draw on these same resilience features related to mental health. The relative absence of expressing love and empathy in Sudan when children have problems seems to suggest a greater emotional detachment than in the other two countries.

In terms of mastery, parents and children from each site focus on communication skills and problem solving. Differences occur between Sudan and Namibia with Armenia: children in Sudan and Namibia solve their own problems by seeking help outside the family or doing so alone. In Armenia, the interaction between the parents and the children continues over the course of resolving the problem with changes in actions made as needed.

The actions that prevent the development of resilience are similar in each country and are damaging to both mental health and mastery. The data from the IRRP for all 27 sites of the research indicate resilience promoting behavior occurs in from 30% of the responses. Therefore, the large percentage of children receiving little or no help or support and having few skills to address experiences of adversity, suggests the extent of the need for the promotion of resilience in children.

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